



NEW YORK STATE SENATE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY

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Senate Majority Passes Legislation Protecting Ratepayers

(Albany, NY) Today, the Senate Democratic Majority passed legislation to further protect ratepayers across New York State. This legislation continues the work of the Senate Majority to eliminate price surging, and hold utility companies accountable. Last year the State Senate Investigations Committee conducted a study into utility price surges and this legislation package works to address those findings. This package of bills will address utility storm response, protect property owners, improve utility payment plans, and protect ratepayers from unfair practices.

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said, “Far too many New Yorkers have difficulty understanding their utility bills, and often the determination of rates is unclear, leaving the consumer frustrated with their utility companies. Today's bill package addresses the outdated and inaccessible process to protect ratepayers across New York, and hold utility companies responsible. Additionally, this bill package works to address the affordability of utilities and expand payment plan options to consumers. I'd like to thank today's bill sponsors for protecting consumers and working to lessen the economic burden on families across New York.”

Chair of the Energy and Telecommunications Committee, Senator Kevin Parker, said, “In these strapped economic times in which we live, it is imperative that we do all within our power as lawmakers to help struggling New Yorkers. One area where this is achievable and can bring much-needed relief is utility bill payments. Therefore, I am happy to support the bill package that can achieve just this by calling on the Public Service Commission to set minimum standards for payment plans established by utility companies in the state. New Yorkers pay some of the highest fixed charges in the nation on their utility bills, and during a long period of inflation and extraordinarily high energy rates, payment plans should be more accessible and available to individuals who have demonstrated the need.”

The legislation passed by the Senate Democratic Majority includes:

- **Accurate Meter Readings:** This bill, [S1851A](#), sponsored by Senator Michelle Hinchey, directs utilities to file with the Public Service Commission a model procedure for calculating estimated utility bills and to use more actual meter readings.
- **Strengthen Utility Storm Response and Compliance:** This bill, [S4882](#), sponsored by Senator Shelley Mayer would incentivize better regulatory compliance by utilities through increased flexibility for the Public Service Commission to assess penalties on utilities for violations of the Public Service Law, and to expand emergency response plan requirements.
- **Utilities to Adopt the Common Equity Ratio:** This bill, [S6557A](#), sponsored by Senator Shelley Mayer would require electric corporations, gas corporations, steam corporations and water-works corporations to use standardized return on equity calculations set by the public service commission to prevent unjustifiable rate increases.
- **Utility Payment Plans:** This bill, [S1199A](#), sponsored by Senator Kevin Parker would establish minimum standards for payment plans for eligible customers; requires the Public Service Commission to set standards for payment plans for certain customers including reasonableness of agreements and timelines for payment; establishes eligibility.
- **Affordable Payment Plans:** This bill, [S1200A](#), sponsored by Senator Kevin Parker would require utility companies headquartered in New York to establish a statewide program to provide eligible participants with affordable payment plans.
- **Limits Fixed Charges:** This bill, [S1303](#), sponsored by Senator Kevin Parker would direct the Department of Public Service to adjust each utility corporation's residential fixed charge upon such corporation's filing with the Department of rate schedule amendments, to recover only the fixed costs and operation and maintenance expenses directly related to metering, billing, service connections and the provision of customer service.
- **Utility Intervenor Reimbursement:** This bill, [S405](#), sponsored by Senator Kevin Parker would authorize 'intervenor' who advocate on behalf of resident and small business consumers to apply for reimbursement for the costs attributable with participation in a Public Service Commission rate-making proceeding.
- **Civil Penalties for False Statements:** This bill, [S6710](#), sponsored by Senator James Skoufis would establish civil penalties for utilities that knowingly make false material statements to the Public Service Commission in relation to a rate-making proceeding.
- **Notification to Property Owners:** This bill, [S5130](#), sponsored by Senator Lea Webb would require corporations and municipal utilities to notify property owners prior to beginning scheduled service work that may interfere with a property owner's ability to enjoy, use, or access such property owner's property.

Bill Sponsor Senator Michelle Hinchey said, “Utility companies are using estimation formulas that are not based on past usage, making it impossible for New Yorkers to afford, let alone trust, their utility bills. My legislation to ban the practice will help ensure that this never happens again

while bringing needed transparency and accountability to the utility industry in New York. I'm proud to stand with my colleagues in protecting ratepayers and holding utilities to a higher standard."

Bill Sponsor, Senator Shelley B. Mayer said, "I am proud two of my bills passed the Senate today as part of the ratepayer protection package to protect New Yorkers. The increasing costs of utility bills has made it harder for residents to make ends meet, and we must put the interest of New Yorkers above the interest of companies. My bill [S.6557A](#) will shift the balance of interest when the Public Service Commission determines rates, swinging the pendulum towards ratepayers and prioritizing New Yorkers' right to have stable utility rates that are as low as possible. My other bill, [S.4882](#) will hold utility companies accountable for failure to prepare for and respond to storms by expanding oversight. As New York faces more frequent and intense storms, utility companies must protect New Yorkers and provide them service to the best of their abilities when their ratepayers need it the most and be held accountable if they cannot. New Yorkers are entitled to an affordable, high quality utility service, and this package affirms our commitment to that goal. Thank you to Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and my colleagues for this package of bills."

Bill Sponsor Senator James Skoufis said, "In this era of unreasonable rate hikes, massive billing errors, and an utter lack of corporate accountability, utility consumers need and deserve protection under state law. My bill to slam utility companies with quarter-million-dollar fines when they've demonstrably lied to or misled ratepayers is one of many reforms needed to hold these corporations' feet to the fire, and I applaud the passage of this wide-ranging slate of consumer protections."

Bill Sponsor Senator Lea Webb said, "Utility companies have an obligation to provide their services to ratepayers at a reasonable price and to deliver high-quality and consistent customer service. Not all utility providers and municipalities are currently required to notify a property owner of scheduled services that might impact their property. My legislation requires utility companies to communicate in a timely manner and provide comprehensive notice to homeowners at least 5 days before any scheduled services that would interfere with their ability to use or access their property. My bill and the package of legislation we are passing today, provides some important protections and resources for consumers, many of whom are still struggling to find financial stability."

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